

Advent 4, December 21, 2025

**ISAIAH 7:10–14.** (EHV)

The LORD spoke to Ahaz again. He said, “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God. Ask for it either in the depths below or in the heights above.” But Ahaz responded, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.” So Isaiah said:

Listen now, you house of David. Is it not enough for you to test the patience of men? Will you test the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord himself will give a sign for all of you. Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.

What would be more unbelievable—a dad making a promise to give his daughter whatever she wanted for Christmas, no exceptions, as long as she asked nicely, or the daughter shrugging her shoulders and refusing the offer?

Today we wrap up our Advent series, “Behold the Beyond,” by beholding a promise given by God that was beyond comprehension on several levels.

King Ahaz of Judah lived more than 700 years before Christ was born, and he was a wicked king. He had a God-fearing father who walked steadfastly before the LORD, but Ahaz ignored whatever godly training his father gave him and whatever godly example his father set for him. Instead he made cast idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the valley south of Jerusalem and sacrificed his sons in the fire there. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. He cared very little for God’s Word.

Yet when the king of Aram and the king of Israel allied themselves and prepared to attack King Ahaz and the land of Judah, God in his grace sent his prophet Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him that these two kings would not succeed.

And the LORD was even more gracious than that. He invited Ahaz to ask him for a sign to confirm that what he was saying was true. The sky was literally the limit: “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God. Ask for it either in the depths below or in the heights above.” When we say, “He searched high and low,” we mean that the person in question searched everywhere. So too when the LORD invites Ahaz to ask for a sign in the depths below or in the heights above, he is inviting him to ask for any sign he can think of. Did he want a coyote to turn into a pheasant? Did he want to see a cow grow wings and fly? Did he want a grape to talk? Did he want to see what was happening on the other side of the world? Did he want a clear blue sky to turn orange at noon? All he had to do was name it; God was promising to fulfill it. It would serve to bolster Ahaz’s confidence against his enemies, and he could in turn pass that confidence down to his people. That God would give wicked King Ahaz such a promise is beyond our comprehension.

“But Ahaz responded, ‘I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.’” Ahaz rejects the LORD’s gracious invitation. He tries to reject it under a show of piety. The LORD had told the Israelites not to put him to the test, so Ahaz seems to quote that passage as if to say, “I don’t want to disobey the LORD’s command.” But Ahaz knew fully well that God’s command not to put him to the test was a command not to test him apart from his Word, but to trust it implicitly. So by not accepting the LORD’s invitation, Ahaz was in fact testing God in a bad way. He wanted nothing to do with God. He wanted nothing to do with God’s amazing promises.

“So Isaiah said: ‘Listen now, you house of David. Is it not enough for you to test the patience of men? Will you test the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord himself will give a sign for all of you.’” Did you hear what happened as a result of Ahaz’s rejection of God and his Word? “Ask for a sign from the LORD”—all capital letters—“*your* God” becomes “*my* God” and “the Lord” with only one capital letter—not the name that focuses on his grace and faithfulness, but the name that focuses on his sovereignty and might.

Yet the LORD will not leave Ahaz without a sign. He will give him one of the greatest signs of all time. It will be a sign that will stand as a rallying point for those who put their confidence in the LORD of every age, and a sign that will stand as a witness against those who reject him and his Word in every age: “Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.” And we heard in the Gospel from Matthew 1 how this was fulfilled.

Still today the majority of humanity wants nothing to do with God, and they want nothing to do with his amazing promises, including this one. Back when the New International Version was being updated, one of the reasons that many people were upset with it was that it added a footnote to the word *virgin* that says, “or *young woman*.” And there are other versions that actually have, “a young woman shall conceive.” The implication is that this is not a prophecy explicitly referring to a virgin conceiving, but that it could also be referring to a young woman who has been intimate with a man conceiving.

But such people are ignoring especially three things. First, they are ignoring that even though the word translated “virgin” here could also be translated “young woman,” every time the word is used elsewhere it is clearly referring to a woman who is so young that thinking of her as anything but a virgin would be taking a liberty, a young woman between the ages of, say, eleven and fourteen. It’s like our English word *maiden*, which simply means a young woman, but none of you imagine a maiden as anything but a virgin. Or it is like the German word *Jungfrau*, which is actually made from two words that literally mean *young woman*, but the word *Jungfrau* means *virgin*.

Second, imagine if your rich uncle were to tell you, “Nephew *or* niece, ask me to give you something incredible or to do something unbelievable for you.” Imagine furthermore that you refused him, so he said, “Fine, if you’re not going to pick something, then I will pick something for you. Watch this! I’m going to give you...a dime.” It wouldn’t really fit with his original invitation.

The Lord has just invited Ahaz to ask for any sign he could imagine. Ahaz has refused, and so now the Lord himself is going to give him a sign. For the Lord to say, “a young woman who has been intimate with a man will conceive,” as his sign would be a letdown after what he has promised Ahaz. That wouldn’t be a sign at all. Young women who have been intimate with a man conceive every day.

This point is underscored by the word order in the Hebrew. Usually a Hebrew sentence begins with the verb and the subject comes second. If I wanted to say, “A woman will conceive,” in Hebrew, in addition to using the appropriate Hebrew words, I would also have to change the word order to, “Will conceive a woman.” I would only put the subject first if I wanted to emphasize it. The Hebrew of this prophecy literally reads, “Therefore will give the Lord himself to you a sign: Behold! The maiden, pregnant, and giving birth to a son.” How much sense would

it make if the Lord meant to say, “I myself am going to give you a sign: Behold! A young sexually active woman is going to get pregnant and give birth to a son”? You can just about imagine what everyone’s reaction would have been, especially Ahaz’s: “Ooh, really powerful stuff there, God.”

Finally, they are ignoring the beauty and necessity of the virgin birth of the Savior. When God first told Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior to crush the serpent’s head, he told them that he would be the seed of the woman, not of the man, and for good reason. From the moment Adam and Eve fell into sin, from that moment on every human conceived from a human father and mother could only be conceived in sin, including you and I. Sin is not just something we do. Sinner is who we are. Sinners are born, not made.

And so if a human was going to come and crush the serpent’s head, that human would have to be different. He would have to be a human not conceived and born from a human father and mother.

Oh, he *would* have to be human. Galatians 4:4–5 says, “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law.” If he were not born from a human as a human, if he were not born under law, he could not redeem those under law.

But he could not be *only* a human, or else he would have been conceived and born sinful, and our redemption would have been a failed mission before he was even placed in the manger. No, he had to be born of a virgin, not of any human seed, but of divine seed. Psalm 49:7–8 tells us, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.” But this would be no ordinary man. This would be a man born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, true God, true man, Jesus Christ.

That is why Mary would call Jesus, “Immanuel.” *Immanu El* means “God with us.” Isaiah isn’t just talking about the fact that God himself would live and walk among us in the flesh and in the presence of other humans. He is also talking about the fact that, by taking on human flesh in the womb of the virgin, God will show himself to be with us as our ally, not against us, but for us, on our side. He is not our enemy or destroyer. He is our friend, our Savior.

This is a promise beyond comprehension. Not just the physical aspect—after all, the most basic biology tells us that you always need a male seed and a female egg in order for a human to grow in the womb of a woman—but also the spiritual aspect—that in Jesus Christ, God will be with us and for us, in spite of the fact that the King Ahazes of the world want nothing to do with him, yes, in spite of the fact that we, too, by nature do not want to hear how the Messiah must be born of the virgin in order to redeem us because we are corrupt from our very birth.

And the apostle Paul tells us that all of God’s promises are yes in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). If God saw to it that he made such a promise beyond comprehension, and then actually fulfilled it over 700 years later, then what promises will he not keep?

He has promised to bless us even in our worst misfortunes. That is beyond comprehension! Yet look! The virgin has conceived and given birth to a son!

He has promised to provide richly for our needs when we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, even if doing so means that we’re not seizing all of the opportunities to make

more money that we could be otherwise. That is beyond comprehension. Yet look! The virgin has conceived and has given birth to a son!

He has promised to forgive all our sins, no matter how many, no matter how wretched. That is beyond comprehension! Yet look! The virgin has conceived and given birth to a son!

He has promised to prepare a place for us in heaven. That is beyond comprehension! Yet look! The virgin has conceived and given birth to a son!

He has promised to return one day soon and destroy the earth as we know it, and everything in it, with fire, and take us with him to our heavenly home. That is beyond comprehension, especially during this season when snow usually covers the ground! Yet look! The virgin has conceived and given birth to a son!

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel Gabriel, “since I am a virgin?”

“Nothing will be impossible for God,” the angel answered (Luke 1:34, 37). Nothing—not the virgin birth, not any of the promises beyond comprehension that he has given you. Behold the Beyond! But you don’t need to look way beyond to see the Beyond. The Beyond has come near. He is born of a virgin. He lies in a manger. God is with us. Amen.